

Valentine's Lasting Legacy: Embracing the Greatest Act of Love



by Rolaant McKenzie

February 11, 2024

Valentine's Day, also called Saint Valentine's Day or the Feast of Saint Valentine, is celebrated every February 14 in North America and various parts of South America, Europe, and Asia. Though it is a day celebrating romance and love, often with candy, flowers, and other gifts of affection, it originated as a Christian feast day honoring a martyr named Valentine.

According to church historical tradition, Valentinus (the Latin version of Valentine) was a pastor who ministered in Umbria, central Italy, during the Roman persecution against Christians in the 3rd century. As he preached the gospel, he secretly protected believers from the government by hiding them.

Valentinus was eventually placed under house arrest for his evangelistic efforts and helping Christians, which was a serious crime. He was also condemned for disobeying the order against marrying Christian couples, allowing the husbands to escape conscription into the Roman army. Roman soldiers were in short supply at this time, and it was the view of the Roman government that married men would be ineffective fighters and therefore a hindrance to the security of the empire. This account also mentions that in order to remind husbands of

their vows and God's love, Valentinus would cut hearts from parchment and give them to these persecuted Christians.

During this time of imprisonment, Valentinus had the opportunity to discuss his faith in Jesus with Asterius, the judge overseeing his case. The judge put Valentinus to the test and brought to him his adopted daughter, who suffered from blindness. Asterius challenged Valentinus, saying that if he succeeded in restoring the girl's sight, he would grant whatever request he made. Valentinus, praying to God, laid his hands on her eyes, and the child's vision was restored.

Astonished and overwhelmed with joy, the judge asked Valentinus what he wanted. Valentinus called on Asterius to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, asked that all of the idols around his house be removed and destroyed, that he fast for three days, and that he be baptized. The judge did as Valentinus asked, and as a result, his household of more than 40 family members and servants also believed and were baptized. Asterius also freed all of the Christian prisoners under his jurisdiction.

Valentinus continued to preach the gospel and minister to the faithful, but was arrested again. This time he was taken to Rome to be judged by Emperor Claudius II Gothicus (268-270 AD) himself. Claudius took a liking to Valentinus and may have been lenient with him until he sought to convince him to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Becoming enraged, Claudius refused and commanded him to renounce his faith, or else he would be condemned to death by being beaten with clubs and beheaded.

During his last days, Valentinus often thought of his family and friends (including the daughter of Asterius). Since they were forbidden to visit, they developed a unique way of sending messages to each other. He would squeeze his arm through the bars in his window to reach the violets that grew outside. Each day, after picking a heart-shaped leaf, he would

carefully pierce it with a message like "From your Valentinus." He would then send it to his loved ones by way of homing pigeons supplied by his family. Toward the end of his life, the message changed to a simple, "I love you."

Even after enduring tortuous punishments and offers of wealth and position along with his freedom, Valentinus refused to renounce his Christian faith and turn away from the Lord he had grown to love. He was executed outside the Flaminian Gate on February 14, 269 AD.

For Valentinus, love was more than the mushy, gushy stuff many think of today. It was above sentimental feelings or infatuation. It was deeper than sexual attraction or physical desire. It was a love strong enough to face the rugged times of life, suffering, severe persecution, and death. It was the kind of love that moved him to risk the danger of preaching the gospel, even to those seeking his hurt, and giving refuge to Christians in the face of the wrath of the Roman government out to destroy them.

This love came from the forgiveness, joy, and peace Valentinus received from God through faith in Jesus Christ, the greatest act of love for humanity lost in sin and separated from God and true life, just as the apostle Paul wrote more than two hundred years before:

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous

man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**" (Romans 5:1-10)

Just as the blood that makes the heart red gives life to the body (Leviticus 17:11), so the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross for sinners grants forgiveness of sin, the gift of reconciliation with God, and eternal life to all who trust in Him.

For those who celebrate Valentine's Day or not, remember the faithfulness of Valentinus through his acts of love and refusal to renounce Christ unto death, and that true love is more than a feeling that comes and goes. It is not based on transitory things like circumstances, the weather, or personal possessions.

True love is what comes from God through His Son Jesus Christ, who redeems with His precious blood all who trust in Him (1 Peter 1:17-19). And those who have received this love of God should share it through proclaiming the gospel and acts of love for others throughout the year, even if it means putting the other person's needs, desires, and wishes first or going out of your way to accept, respect, and forgive (Ephesians 4:32).

© 2023 Rolaant McKenzie – All Rights Reserved

E-Mail Rolaant McKenzie: rolaant@gospeloutreach.net

Website: <http://www.gospeloutreach.net/>